

Message Text

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USDEL SALT TWO GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 1097

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, US, PARM, SALT, SOPN, CSCE

SUBJECT: MFA PRESS CONFERENCE FOR AMERICAN JOURNALISTS JAN 24

1. SUMMARY. MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT CHIEF SOFINSKIY CALLED MOSCOW-BASED U.S. JOURNALISTS TO MINISTRY JAN 24 FOR PRESENTATION WHICH WAS MAINLY RERUN OF BREZHNEV'S TULA SPEECH AND Q-AND-A PERIOD MAINLY DEVOTED TO SALT AND WORKING CONDITIONS FOR JOURNALISTS IN USSR. LA TIMES CORRESPONDENT TOTH IN VAIN PRESSED SOFINSKIY ON WHETHER SOVIET DESIRE FOR SALT II ON BASIS VLADIVOSTOK MEANT EXCLUSION OF CRUISE AND BACKFIRE. WE WEE SOVIET INTENTIONS IN CALLING PRESS CONFERENCE AS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN SUBSTANCE. WE SPECULATE THAT SOVIETS WANT TO BRING PRESS IN ON A POSITIVE NEW STAGE IN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS THEY DESIRE, AND ALSO WISH TO SHORT-CIRCUIT OUR DEC 14 PROPOSAL FOR BILATERAL DISCUSSION OF WORKING CONDITIONS FOR JOURNALISTS AMONG OFFICIALS IN CSCE CONTEXT. IF DEPARTMENT AGREES, WE PROPOSE TO REMIND MFA THAT PROPOSAL IS STILL ON TABLE. END SUMMARY.

2. MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT CHIEF AMBASSADOR V.N. SOFINSKIY

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CONVOKED RESIDENT U.S. PRESS CORPS IN MOSCOW TO PRESENTATION AND Q-AND-A SESSION AT MINISTRY JAN 24. EMBASSY OFFICERS WERE NOT INVITED. ON BASIS DETAILED READOUTS FROM U.S. PARTICIPANTS, PRESENTATION WAS MAINLY RERUN OF BREZHNEV'S TULA SPEECH. SESSION LASTED ABOUT ONE-AND-HALF HOURS, AND HAD FOLLOWING HIGHLIGHTS:

--AFTER "STATUS QUO" IN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS "DETERMINED IN PART BY ELECTIONS," THERE SHOULD NOW BE A "NEW GREAT SHIFT FORWARD," AND MASS MEDIA HAVE IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY.

--U.S. MASS MEDIA HAVE GIVEN "INSUFFICIENT" COVERAGE TO DEFINITION OF DETENTE IN TULA SPEECH, WHICH SOFINSKIY READ.

--U.S. ALLEGATIONS ABOUT SOVIET INTENTION TO DEVELOP FIRST STRIKE CAPABILITY AROUSED HIS SPECIAL IRE. IN Q-AND-A REFERNECE TO COMMENTARY ON CIVIL DEFENSE, SOFINSKIY SAID "PSYCHOSIS" IS THE ONLY WORD FOR WHAT IS BEING WHIPPED UP.

--THE TULA SPEECH IS A CONCRETE PROGRAM--HE TICKED OFF SALT, NON-PROLIFERATION, MBFR AND THE MIDDLE EAST, ADDING CSCE ONLY ON SECOND GO-AROUND-BUT ABOVE ALL IT IS LONG-RANGE, A POINT HE MADE SEVERAL TIMES.

--THE CONCLUSION: THE SOONER THE TULA PROGRAM IS IMPLEMENTED THE BETTER; THERE SHOULD BE MUTUAL DESIRE TO IMPLEMENT IT; THE SOVIETS ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO PROGRESS.

3. MOST INTENSIVE TO-AND-FRO Q-AND-A PERIOD CONCERNED SALT. LA TIMES CORRESPONDENT BOB TOTH ASKED WHETHER STRESS ON VLADIVOSTOK BASIS FOR SALT AGREEMENT MEANT SOVIETS WANTED THEN PERCENT REDUCTIONS IN SALT III INSTEAD OF SALT II. SOFINSKIY REPLIED THAT VLADIVOSTOK WAS A GOOD DETAILED AGREEMENT REACHED AFTER HARD NEGOTIATION; THAT WE ARE LOOKING IN ITS THIRD YEAR; THAT WE DO NOT HAVE TO REFUSE TO GO FARTHER, BUT THAT WE SHOULD GET THIS DONE NOW, AND WORK ON BASIS OF WHAT WE HAVE. WHEN HE CONFIDENTIAL

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TURNED TO TEN PERCENT, TOTH INTERJECTED, "YOU MEAN THE MARCH PROPOSAL," AND SOFINSKIY REPLIED, "I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE REFERRING TO," BUT RESISTED FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO ELICIT DETAILS. ASKED WHETHER BACKFIRE AND CRUISE SHOULD BE EXCLUDED, HE REFERRED LISTENERS TO BREZHNEV'S TULA REMARKS ON SUBMARINE AND STRATEGIC BOMBERS.

4. MOST OF Q-AND-A SESSION, HOWEVER, WAS TUG-OF-WAR OVER WORKING CONDITIONS FOR AMERICAN JOURNALISTS IN USSR, WITH SOFINSKIY LISTENING WHAT HAD BEEN DONE FOR THEM SINCE (AND AS RESULT OF) HELSINKI AND EXPLAINING WHAT COULD NOT BE DONE AS FUNCTION OF SOVIET SYSTEM, WHICH THEY SHOULD UNDERSTAND, IN PROCESS HE COMPLAINED ABOUT CHAKOVSKIY VISA REFUSAL, SPECIFICALLY IN HELSINKI CONTEXT, AND JOURNALISTS COMPLAINED ABOUT DIFFICULTIES OF GETTING TV CAMERA CREWS, NOW THAT RESPONSIBILITY IS WITH STATE COMMITTEE FOR RADIO AND TELEVISION RATHER THAN NOVOSTI, AND ABOUT PAUCITY OF PRESS BRIEFINGS THE SOVIETS OFFER. IN GENERAL, OUR SOURCES SAY, SOFINSKIY

WAS MAKING EVIDENT EFFORT TO BE REASONABLE AND POSITIVE,
WITH INDIFFERENT SUCCESS.

5. UPI TELLS US IT WILL BE FILING ON SOFINSKIY'S
REMARKS CONCERNING LIMITATION OF SALT II SUBJECT MATTER
TO VLADIVOSTOK AS EVIDENCE OF NEGOTIATING TREND TOWARD
EXCLUDING CRUISE AND BACKFIRE. TOTH HIMSELF SAYS HE
DOES NOT INTEND TO FILE.

6. COMMENT. SOVIET INTENTIONS IN HOLDING THE SESSION
APPEAR TO US MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN ACTUAL CONTENT. WE
SEE TWO POSSIBLE REASONS FOR DECISION TO CONVOKE U.S.
MOSCOW-BASED PRESS EARLY IN NEW ADMINISTRATION:

--THE SOVIETS MAY WISH TO GET OFF ON A BETTER FOOT
WITH OUR FOURTH ESTATE AS PART OF A GENERAL EFFORT
TO GET THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP MOVING AGAIN IN THE
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DIRECTION THEY DESIRE. SOFINSKIY'S STRESS ON "LONG-
RANGE" CHARACTER OF BREZHNEV'S TULA REMARKS SEEMS EX-
PLICABLE MAINLY IN THIS LIGHT. BREZHNEV, AFTER ALL, WAS
TALKING PRIMARILY ABOUT THE IMMEDIATE AGENDA, AND FOR
SOFINSKIY TO INSIST ON LONG-RANGE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPEECH--
AND CHARGE THAT OUR PRESS MISSED IT--SUGGESTS HIS MAIN
PURPOSE WAS TO ENLIST U.S. PRESS SUPPORT FOR THE ARGUMENT THAT
BREZHNEV SPEECH OFFERS BASIS FOR BEGINNING A MORE POSITIVE
NEW ERA.

WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY INCLUDED "WORKING CONDI-
TIONS FOR JOURNALISTS" IN OUR CSCE BILATERAL DEMARCHES TO
THE SOVIETS, AND ON DECEMBER 14 WE PROPOSED DISCUSSION
OF THIS TOPIC AMONG OFFICIALS. EVIDENTLY SOFINSKIY'S
INITIATIVE IS A SOVIET ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM
WITHOUT OFFICIALS INTERFERENCE FROM THE AMERICAN SIDE, AND
WE SUSPECT THAT WHEN WE RAISE IT AGAIN WE WILL BE
TOLD IT HAS ALREADY BEEN TAKEN CARE OF, AT SOVIET INITIA-
TIVE, AS CSCE IMPLEMENTATION. IF DEPARTMENT AGREES, WE
WOULD PROPOSE TO TAKE AN EARLY OPPORTUNITY TO REMIND THE
MFA THAT OUR DECEMBER 14 PROPOSAL IS STILL ON THE TABLE.
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